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HEGEL'S *ANTIGONE* AND THE DIALECTICS OF SEXUAL DIFFERENCE

Karin de Boer

Hegel has been widely criticized for his conservative conception of the fixed social positions assigned to men and women. This critique concerns first of all the section of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* where he discusses, with reference to Sophocles' *Antigone,* the conflict between two forms of ethical life characteristic of Greek culture. Philosophers such as Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler, and Patricia Mills have argued that Hegel's reading of *Antigone* consolidates traditional hierarchical oppositions such as those between nature and culture, the feminine and the masculine, private and public, and body and spirit. Countering Hegel's purportedly masculine view of sexual difference, they picture Antigone as undermining rather than confirming these and similar oppositions.[1] It seems to me, however, that these feminist readings tend to ignore that Hegel's analysis of Greek ethical life pertains only to the immediate mode of ethical life, that is, a mode that calls for its dissolution. Moreover, this analysis, although relying on *Antigone,* is not intended as an interpretation of this tragedy. One cannot, therefore, simply blame Hegel for having misinterpreted this play. It goes without saying that the way in which human beings identify with specific cultural values is not necessarily based on sexual difference. My critique of these philosophers concerns, therefore, not so much their views on sexual difference as their critique of Hegel's conception of sexual difference.

This is not to say that I fully endorse Hegel's understanding of the cultural meaning of sexual difference. Given the history of the twentieth century it has become impossible to maintain that physical differences between the sexes determine the relations of human beings to themselves, the relations between human beings, or their position in society as a whole. If, as Hegel maintains, philosophy is to grasp its own time in thought, then our own time demands that we reflect on the history in which sexual differences have lost much of their traditional significance.[2] Although Hegel makes clear that the immediate mode of ethical life had to dissolve, he did not give much thought to the ensuing development of the ways in which men and women might identify with values traditionally considered as masculine or feminine. I believe, however, that Hegel's analysis of natural ethical life in the *Phenomenology* can be used to philosophically reflect on this question. If Hegel's philosophy consists from the outset in countering tendencies, then it should be possible to let one of these tendencies develop into a conception of sexual difference that neither identifies men and women with their physical differences nor completely ignores the significance of these differences.[3] Starting out from Hegel's analysis of natural ethical life, I will argue that the way in which the experience of sexual difference became culturally determined in ancient Greece opened up a movement in which the distribution of the private and the public realm over the two sexes is increasingly dissolved.

In order to sketch out this movement I will draw on some passages where Hegel reflects on *Antigone* in a manner that seems to undermine the clear-cut opposition between nature and culture he generally upholds. These passages strongly suggest that Hegel considers sexual difference never to have been merely natural, but to have always already been permeated by cultural significance. If this is the case, then there is no reason why sexual difference should not be submitted to the dialectical principle that forces any historical mode of culture to overcome its one-sidedness. Accordingly, one might argue that the history of spirit is also a history in which men and women become increasingly aware that hierarchical oppositions such as those between family and state, emotion and reason, body and mind, receptivity and activity, nature and spirit, are not to be distributed over human beings according to their sex. Thus emphasizing the cultural significance of sexual difference, I will—with and against Hegel—reinterpret the history of spirit as a history in which the one-sided distribution of cultural values over the two sexes is increasingly overcome. I will do this not so much by deploying Sophocles against Hegel as by deploying Hegel's own text against the prevailing interpretation of it.

Hegel's Conception of Greek Ethical Life

Hegel's interpretation of sexual difference occurs within the context of an investigation into the possible modes of objective spirit, that is, of the modes of self-consciousness that can be achieved by societies as a whole. The *Phenomenology of Spirit* systematically reconstructs the totality of possible modes of self-consciousness, that is, of subjective and objective spirit. What Hegel means by this latter mode of spirit might be best translated, in my view, by the term "culture." This is to say that a society consists not only in the actual development of ethico-political structures and institutions, but also in the ways it becomes conscious of its basic principles.[4] Each society has some kind of understanding of that which is ultimately at stake in it. Whenever this understanding is expressed, a society can be considered to become conscious of itself. One might argue that these modes of self-consciousness—enacted in public debates, the media, science, religion, art, and philosophy—are the ways in which a society establishes itself as a culture and achieves insight into its basic principles.

In the *Phenomenology* Hegel conceives of Greek culture as a culture that was initially based on the immediate harmony between two complementary ethical principles, but that became increasingly aware of the inherent conflict between these principles.[5] These ethical principles obtained naturally and had not yet been consciously appropriated. In my view, the emerging conflict between these principles primarily concerned the conflict between an archaic and a rational determination of justice. Whereas the archaic determination of justice was based on values such as kinship, rituals, and revenge, the rational determination of justice was based on values such as equality and rational deliberation. As the rational principle of justice increasingly established itself as the dominant principle, thus threatening to destroy the archaic principle of justice, the initial harmony between these two ethical principles gave way to their conflict. Only when this fateful conflict began to unfold did it become possible and necessary for Greek culture to reflect on the principles constituting its ethical life. According to Hegel, this reflection of Greek culture on its constitutive principles, that is, its self-reflection, is accomplished first of all in its tragedies. Since, according to Hegel, the realm of natural ethical life characteristic of Greek culture continues to play a part in societies which have freed themselves to a much larger extent from nature, it is crucial for him to develop a philosophical interpretation of the "tragedy which the absolute eternally enacts with itself."[6]

Hegel considers Sophocles' *Antigone* to express most eminently the tragic conflict between the opposed forms of ethical life characteristic of Greek culture. Both of these forms can be considered to accomplish an act of consciousness that interrupts "the work of nature."[7] Hegel refers in this respect to the ethical obligation to bury one's next of kin. This ethical act wrests away the deceased from the purely destructive power of nature and lets him or her become part of a community extending itself over the generations. The ethical duty to bury one's next of kin is clearly based on the archaic principle of justice. Within Greek culture the reach of this principle, which Hegel calls divine law (Phen 297/297), is limited to the sphere of the family. The rational principle of justice, on the other hand, governs public life. Hegel calls this principle human law. Thus, Greek society structured its ethical life by distin-

guishing between the sphere of the family and the sphere of public life, governed by divine law and human law respectively.

Within the sphere of the family, Hegel distinguishes between three kinds of relations: the relation between husband and wife, parents and children, and brother and sister. Since the relation between husband and wife is intermingled with natural feeling, he regards this relation to be not yet truly ethical (299/273). This relation has not yet completely freed itself from its natural determination. Hegel seems to regard this as the reason why men and women initially could not but identify with either of the ethical principles. Whereas men will by nature adhere to human law, women will by nature adhere to divine law:

> Yet ethical consciousness knows what it has to do, and it is determined to belong to either divine or human law. The immediacy of its decision is something in itself, and therefore has at once the significance of something natural . . . ; nature assigns one sex to one law and the other to the other law. (305/304, translation modified)

Interestingly, Hegel here argues, on the one hand, that ethical consciousness identifies with either of the two ethical principles on the basis of a "decision," yet, on the other, that nature decides with which of the two principles someone is allowed to identify. This seems to mean that within a culture unfolding in the element of natural immediacy, a girl's "decision" to get married and devote herself to her family is as yet completely dependent on the natural difference between men and women. For Hegel, however, this difference is never exclusively natural. In the passage just quoted he claims that the ethical, that is, the cultural, choice for either of the two principles has at once the significance of a natural fact. It follows from this that the allegedly natural character of sexual difference is from the outset permeated by cultural significance. In other words, the natural moment of sexual difference is no more primordial or fundamental than its cultural significance.[8]

Thus, the Greeks interrupted the work of nature not just by burying their next of kin, but also by identifying with one of the two principles constituting ethical life as such. Although Hegel considers this initial cultural identification to be necessarily in line with the natural differences between men and women (301/275–76), he by no means considers this one-sided identification to be the most perfect form of ethical life. To the contrary, this identification merely characterizes immediate ethical life, and for that reason constitutes only the beginning of the history of possible ethical relations. According to Hegel, a culture that forces men and women to identify one-sidedly with either human or divine law is doomed to be ruined. An ethical act resulting from such a one-sided identification

> contains the moment of crime, because it does not sublate the *natural* allocation of the two laws to the two sexes, but rather . . . remains within the sphere of natural immediacy. Such an act turns this one-sidedness into guilt, a guilt that consists in seizing only one side of the essence, while adopting a negative attitude toward the other, that is, violating it.[9]

Hegel here clearly refers to the conflict between Antigone and Creon. Antigone identifies one-sidedly with the divine law that tells her to bury her brother Polyneikes. Her uncle Creon, on the other hand, identifies one-sidedly with the law according to which traitors have forfeited their right to be buried. Perhaps more compelling than any other tragedy, *Antigone* shows that a culture wherein the distribution of the two ethical principles is determined by the natural difference between men and women is not in accordance with the essence of human culture as such, that is, with freedom. Such a culture must necessarily perish and give way to a culture that is better suited to organize itself in accordance with the principle of human freedom. In sum, the element of immediate ethical life does not yet allow human beings to consciously overcome their immediate cultural identification with either of the two ethical principles and to acknowledge their limited truth (cf. 315/289).

Toward a History of Sexual Difference

Because the ethical "choices" of individual human beings are, in Greek culture, largely dependent on their sex and social position, this culture constitutes a limited and inappropriate form of spirit. Hegel interprets the downfall of Greek culture as clearing the way for the development of a legal system based on the equal rights of individual citizens (cf. 316/290). The *Phenomenology* does not, however, indicate how this development allowed men and women to increasingly interrupt their immediate identification with either of the two ethical principles and the cultural values bound up with them. In both this text and the later *Philosophy of Right* Hegel seems to presuppose that ethical life contains a purely natural moment that forever resists its dialectical dissolution. The *Philosophy of Right* argues in this respect that the natural difference between men and women continues to determine the social structures of modern society. This society still demands that women confine themselves to the sphere of the family and do not mingle with, for instance, political affairs. According to Hegel, women are by nature incapable of governing, because they act "not on the basis of the demands of the universal, but on the basis of accidental inclination and opinion."[10] If emotion and reason are once and for all distributed over the two sexes by nature itself, these and similar oppositions will forever resist their dialectical sublation. In other words, Hegel here seems to hold fast to the opposition between that in human beings which belongs to nature and that in human beings which belongs to spirit. According to this presupposition, that which is purely natural in human life falls outside the domain of dialectics and hence has no access to the temporal element of history. Although, in this view, modern societies in principle allow the individual human being to develop its immanent freedom, this freedom seems to remain restricted by the natural moment of ethical life. [11] It goes without saying that if one is to develop a philosophical history of sexual self-consciousness, one should first of all give up this presupposition. I have tried to show in the foregoing that this can be done by means of certain passages in the *Phenomenology* itself.

Contrary to the *Philosophy of Right*, these passages make clear that the natural difference between men and women is from the outset permeated by cultural significance and for that reason cannot be excluded from the realm of history. If sexual difference is never exclusively a matter of nature, then it must be possible for both men and women to interrupt their immediate identification with a specific mode of ethical life to a much larger extent than Hegel generally seems to presuppose. If, in other words, the immediate mode of Greek ethical life is not exclusively natural, but is from the outset part of the realm of culture, then one might argue that the history of spirit is also a history within which men and women will increasingly realize that cultural oppositions such as those between family and state, emotion and reason, body and spirit, receptivity and activity, are not to be distributed one-sidedly over the two sexes. In order to sustain this reinterpretation of the history of spirit, I will draw on a section in the *Lectures on Aesthetics* were Hegel discusses the *Antigone*.

Hegel argues in these lectures that the most perfect tragic conflict occurs when the protagonist opposes a principle that constitutes an essential moment of his or her proper existence. This is clearly the case in the *Antigone*: both Antigone and Creon contain within themselves a moment against which they mutually stand. Antigone is not only her brother's sister, but also the daughter of a king. Creon is not only the king of Thebes, but also a father and husband. Thus, although Antigone and Creon identify with the law assigned to them by their sex, they harbor within themselves the law of which they deny the truth.[12] Since their ethical acts evolve out of their immediate identification with the law assigned to them by nature, they cannot but relate to the opposed law as a law

that is foreign to them and that thwarts their own purposes. Now the *Phenomenology* shows time and again that whenever consciousness seems to relate to something merely external to itself, it relates unknowingly to a moment that is in fact internal to itself. Any mode of self-consciousness actualizes itself by no longer excluding the other of itself from itself, but by recognizing this other as a moment belonging to its own being.

If, as Hegel has it, the history of spirit accomplishes the movement in which self-consciousness increasingly recognizes that the other of itself is proper to its own being, then one might regard the history of sexual self-consciousness as a history in which men and women are increasingly able to recognize that values traditionally identified as feminine or masculine essentially belong to their own being. Seen in this way, one might argue that men and women are from the outset determined by the entanglement of masculine and feminine moments, but in such a way that the natural determination of their sex initially allowed them to develop only one of these moments. This natural determination initially forced men, as it were, to only develop their masculine moment and hence to identify with a specific and one-sided ethical principle. Since women, for the same reason, could initially only develop their feminine moment, their ethical choices were necessarily as much in accordance with the natural determination of their sex as those of men.

However, if sexual difference from the outset belongs to the realm of culture, there is no reason why the moments that initially had to remain implicit within men and women should not unfold themselves at some point. To the contrary, Hegel's philosophy as a whole hinges upon the idea that that which is merely implicit or in itself will always strive for its actualization. A seed cannot bear to exist merely in itself and will always seek to develop into a plant.[13] It would seem to follow from this that every human being seeks to actualize its undeveloped feminine or masculine moment so as to fully integrate the other of itself into itself. I believe, however, that things are more complicated than this. I take the view that insofar as individual human beings are concerned it is impossible to completely minimize the cultural significance of natural sexual differences. Many people feel attracted to someone of the other sex precisely because of these differences, which can be said to form one of the major sources of human happiness. I would like to argue, however, that the extent to which someone is willing and able to unfold the moment opposed to his or her own sex is—in our own time—no longer determined by the natural differences between men and women. This is not to say that natural sexual differences play no part at all in contemporary culture. I would rather argue that these differences will, one way or another, continue to delimit the finite space within which men and women each in their own way unfold their feminine and masculine moments, and on that basis develop genuine relations to themselves, to other people, and to the cultural values that inform society as a whole.

Thus, one might regard the history of sexual self-consciousness that Hegel did not write as a history in which the realm of culture is able to interrupt the work of nature to a far greater extent than he considered possible. This culture—our culture[14]—no longer forces people to identify with the ethical principle of either the private or the public realm, nor with other values traditionally viewed as feminine or masculine. Instead it allows human beings to freely explore different possible ways of relating to the opposed moments of sexual difference inherent in each of them, and should perhaps allow this to a yet greater extent. This is not to say, however, that each human being should aspire to a perfect synthesis of moments traditionally distributed over the different sexes, nor that natural sexual differences should play no part at all in the way people define themselves. The opposed moments of sexual difference will always tend to forget their one-sidedness. They depend on each other to become what they are, but they no less tend to destroy each other. It may well be that both the most desirable and the most tragic events in human life originate in this mutual one-sidedness, and we cannot, as Nietzsche has taught us, choose the one without choosing the other.[15]

ENDNOTES

1. Among those who maintain that Hegel's view of the *Antigone* is distorted is P.J. Mills. In "Hegel's *Antigone*," in P. J. Mills, ed., *Feminist Interpretations of G. W. F. Hegel* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press 1996), cf. 69, 75, 77, she regards Antigone's position to be much more complicated than Hegel recognizes, in that she transcends the sphere of the family, among other ways, by taking part in a political debate to defend the principle of the family (76). Thus, Mills' reading of the *Antigone* seeks to develop an emancipatory conception of the possible ways of being woman. This she has in common with Judith Butler, *Antigone's Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), and Luce Irigaray, *Speculum. De l'autre femme* (Paris: Minuit 1974). One might argue that the positions of Butler and Irigaray delimit the realm of possible interpretations of sexual difference. Irigaray seeks to free the classical determination of the feminine from its negative connotations so as to develop a conception of the feminine that is not bound to the hierarchical opposition between masculine and feminine values. For Irigaray, sexual difference does not pertain to a binary opposition and hence cannot be dialectically resolved. She seems to presuppose, however, that women in the end share something like a feminine essence, an essence that is, moreover, related to certain physical characteristics. In contrast with Irigaray, Butler maintains that the significance of physical differences is from the outset determined by specific symbolic, that is, cultural, constructions. Since she argues that it is impossible to determine once and for all the cultural significance of sexual difference, her work much more than that of Irigaray responds to recent social and political developments (such as the gay movement and the increase of non-traditional forms of kinship). Insofar as Irigaray and Butler tend to emphasize either the natural or the cultural determination of the differences between men and women, they, in my view, fail to recognize that both moments are from the outset entangled in each other. I would contend that reflections on sexual difference should begin by no longer privileging either the natural or the cultural moment.
2. G. W. F. Hegel, *Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts, Werke*, eds. E. Moldauer and K. M. Michel (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986), 26; *Elements of the Philosophy of Right,* trans. H. B Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21 (hereafter referred to as EPR). I shall also cite: G. W. F. Hegel, *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1806), eds. H.-F. Wessels and H. Clairmont, (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1988); *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), hereafter referred to as Phen.
3. In her recent book *Hegel and Feminist Philosophy* (Cambridge: Polity, 2003), Kimberley Hutchings addresses the history of feminist philosophy insofar as it has attempted to wrest itself from Hegel. She argues that many feminist contributions to the debate on Hegel remain dependent on the binary oppositions they seek to dissolve (2, 55). On the other hand, she considers Hegel's philosophy to offer possibilities for feminist thought precisely because Hegel, like no one else, has shown that fixed oppositions necessarily sublate themselves. Contrary to Mills, Hutchings does not regards this dissolution to imply the domination of one side over the other (98). Although I value her effort to use Hegelian dialectics for the purposes of feminist thought, it seems to me that she ignores the point at which contemporary philosophy should turn against some of Hegel's basic presuppositions.
4. "Spirit is the ethical life of a nation insofar as it is the immediate truth. . . . It must advance to the consciousness of what it is immediately . . . and by passing through a series of shapes attain to a knowledge of itself" (Phen, 290/265).
5. Cf. ibid., 304/279.
6. G. W. F. Hegel, "Über die wissenschaftlichen Behandlungsarten des Naturrechts, seine Stelle in der praktische Philosophie und sein Verhältnis zu den positiven Wissenschaften," in: *Jenaer Schriften 1801–1807, Werke*, 495; *Natural Law: The Scientific Ways of Treating Natural Law, its Place in Moral Philosophy, and its Relation to the Positive Sciences of Law*, trans. T. M. Knox (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1975), 104. See on Hegel's interpretation of tragedy in

this text my essay "Tragic Entanglements: Between Hegel and Derrida," *Bulletin of the Hegel Society of Great Britain* No. 48 (2003): 33–48.

7. "Blood-relationship supplements, then, the abstract natural process by adding to it the movement of consciousness, interrupting the work of nature and rescuing the blood-relation from destruction" (Phen, 296/271).
8. This is confirmed by the following passage: "This ruin of the ethical substance . . . is thus determined by the fact that ethical consciousness is directed on to the law in a way that is essentially immediate. This determination of immediacy implies that nature as such enters into the ethical act." (Phen 315/289). Cf. also: "Here has emerged the specific opposition of the two sexes, whose natural existence acquires at once the significance of their ethical determination." (Phen 301/276, tr. mod.).
9. Ibid., 308/282 (tr. mod.). Cf.: "The original essence of tragedy consists in the fact that within such a conflict each of the opposed sides, if taken by itself, has justification; while each can establish the true and positive content of its own aim and character only by denying and infringing the equally justified power of the other. For this reason both sides, insofar as they constitute the sides of moral life, become involved in guilt." G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Ästhetik III*, *Werke*, 523; *Aesthetics: Lectures on Fine Art II*, trans. T. M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1196 (tr. mod.), hereafter referred to as Aesth.
10. EPR §166, Add. Hegel notes in §165 that the natural determination of both sexes is rational and therefore acquires ethical meaning. He again leaves open whether the natural or the rational moment of sexual difference is more primordial. This ethical meaning, he adds, is determined by the difference between the two sides of the ethical substance. These sides now occur, on the one hand, as free self-consciousness and the concern with the universal, and, on the other, as feeling and the concern with concrete individuality (§166). Hegel parallels this distinction not only with that between activity and passivity, but also with that between men and women. I have shown that this latter distinction can only be paralleled with that between the opposed moments of the ethical substance insofar as immediate ethical life is concerned.
11. In "Hegel's Antigone," Mills repeatedly emphasizes that Hegel's analysis of natural ethical life pertains first of all to "pagan" ethical life. She rightly points out that Hegel's conception of the modern world excludes this sphere of ethical life from the realm of dialectical progress. Mills considers this exclusion to result from the fact that Hegelian dialectics only can conceive the reconciliation between opposed determinations in terms of the domination of the one over the other. In my view, however, this dialectics might well be deployed to develop a conception of sexual difference not based on such a one-sided domination.
12. "So there is immanent in both Antigone and Creon something that in their own way they attack, so that they are gripped and shattered by something intrinsic to their own actual being. . . . Of all the masterpieces of the classical and the modern world . . . the Antigone seems to me to be the most magnificent and satisfying work of art of this kind." (Aesth III, 549-550 / II, 1217-1218).
13. Cf. G. W. F. Hegel, *Vorlesungen über die Geschichte der Philosophie I*, *Werke*, 41; *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. E. S. Haldane and F. H. Simson (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995), 22.
14. I am aware that the expression "our culture" is questionable, since a culture is always—and perhaps increasingly so—determined by the tension between its countering tendencies. It seems to me that this "cultural difference," occurring, among others, as the tension between the general principles of the state and the particular principles of religious or ethnic communities, or as the tension between social classes or generations, might be interpreted in the same way as I have interpreted sexual difference, that is, as a relation between moments which both depend on each other to accomplish themselves and tend to exclude each other in order to establish themselves as the dominant principle. On this view, a culture cannot flourish unless both moments recognize their mutual dependency and hence the precariousness of their interplay.
15. Cf. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Jenseits von Gut und Böse. Vorspiel einer Philosophie der Zukunft*, in: *Werke* V, eds. G. Colli and M. Montinari (München/ Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), §2; *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future*, trans. W. Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), §2.

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THINKING THROUGH SINGULARITY AND UNIVERSALITY IN LEVINAS

Leslie MacAvoy

We are accustomed to read Levinas's philosophy as an ethical critique of phenomenology or ontology, but his work is relatively infrequently discussed in relation to the canon of moral philosophy. This is no doubt largely due to the fact that important elements of the theoretical systems that undergird these moral philosophies fall within the scope of Levinas's critique of the tradition; thus, we are confident that his view of ethics differs from the standard accounts. However, it can be very instructive to contrast Levinas's view of ethics with the more well-known alternatives in order to determine not whether his view differs, but how. Assessing this difference is crucial if we are to understand what is at stake philosophically in this critique, not only in terms of what might be gained by means of it, but also in terms of what it may put at risk. Moral philosophy has long emphasized that ethics should be principled, and that those principles should be both rational and universal. These qualities are valued because their absence, it is feared, leads to moral relativism. Levinas's philosophy challenges this received view of ethics, yet his work also suggests opposition to relativism in that it continually emphasizes an ethical responsibility that for all intents and purposes seems to be absolute. How does Levinas propose to generate an obligation of sufficient strength to combat relativism without appealing to universal principles? And is he successful?

The magnitude of this question prohibits its being directly addressed here. Instead I will discuss one aspect of Levinas's thought that has bearing on this question, namely, the critical dynamic between singularity and universality that appears as a fairly constant theme in his work. The received view is that Levinas opposes universality on the grounds that it is in the very nature of universals to comprehend particulars by assimilating them under a common concept or principle, and this comprehension strips the particular of its singularity. This concern is expressed repeatedly in *Totality and Infinity* in terms of a "reduction of the other to the same" through which the singularity of the Other—indeed the very alterity of the Other—goes unrecognized.[1] In *Otherwise than Being* Levinas shifts his focus from the singularity of the Other to the singularity of the self, stressing that ethical responsibility is not universal, but is instead singular.[2] This received view of Levinas's critique of universality is not, however, without its ambiguities. For instance, the following questions come to mind: is not the value of the Other's singularity expressed here as a universal, and is not the responsibility to respond to that singularity also expressed as a universal? What resources exist within Levinas's philosophy to authorize such universal expressions? This issue has been taken up in two ways in the literature. First, there are those critics who argue that, at least in *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas makes use of the language of ontology, and it seems implicit in this critique that this language implies a universality that Levinas is trying to overcome.[3] Second, others have asked in relation to *Otherwise than Being* what justifies Levinas's generalization of the singularity of the experience of ethical responsibility. That is, what authorizes him to make the move from realizing that he has such a responsibility to claiming that others have such a responsibility.[4] My question differs from these because I am not asking about universality as a necessary and perhaps unavoidable function of indicative language, nor am I asking about universality in the sense of making generalizations from oneself to others. Instead I am interested in a type of universality that appears in the moment of ethical responsibility itself.

We must begin by clarifying what is meant by "universal," and I will focus on the